



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

NEWS RELEASE

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For immediate release

Contact: Laurel Riek, Environmental Health Specialist, 406-457-8926 or
Gayle Shirley, Communications Coordinator, 406-457-8908

Tips to Protect Personal Health and Safety While Coping with Floods

While the focus during flooding tends to be on its impact on property, residents should not forget to protect the health and safety of themselves and their families.

“People should assume that floodwater is contaminated with bacteria and other disease-carrying germs,” said Laurel Riek, environmental health specialist with the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department. “That’s very important to keep in mind when you’re coping with flooding on your property or in your home.”

Hand-washing is the single most important thing people should do when they come into contact with flood waters, Riek said. Be sure to wash often in water that has not been contaminated – especially before eating.

Riek offered these additional tips to local residents impacted by flooding:

- If you have a private well, and if flood waters have reached your wellhead, assume that your well water is contaminated.
- To get your well water tested for contamination, contact one of these local laboratories: Alpine Analytical, 449-6282; Energy Laboratories, 442-0711; or the State of Montana Public Health Laboratory, 444-2642. A limited supply of sample bottles for testing is available at the East Helena City Hall and at the health department, 1930 Ninth Avenue.
- Don’t use contaminated water or questionable water for any domestic purpose such as cooking, drinking, bathing, brushing your teeth, or making baby formula.
- Use bottled water or, alternatively, disinfect water that might possibly have been contaminated. You can disinfect water in one of two ways: bring it to a boil and allow it to boil for 5 minutes, or mix it with household bleach at a ratio of 5 drops of bleach to 1 quart of water.
- Avoid exposure to flood waters if you have an open wound.
- Beware of potential electrical hazards.
- Don’t let your children play in flood waters.

When cleaning up after flood waters have receded:

- Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves.

- Steam-clean all carpeting.
- Replace fiberglass insulation that has been exposed to flood waters.
- Wash walls and floors with a chlorine solution (1 cup of household bleach to 5 gallons of water). Rinse metal and wood surfaces with clean water after 10 minutes to avoid rusting or other chemical reactions.
- Use bleach or another disinfectant when laundering clothes, bedding, or other fabric items.

For more information on flood cleanup and safety, visit www.lewisandclarkhealth.org. Or call the health department's Environmental Services Division, 447-8355.

The Lewis & Clark City-County Health Department's mission is to improve and protect the health of all Lewis & Clark County residents.

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